

## **CHIP Statement to accompany publication of the research ‘The Role of the Solicitor in the Children’s Hearings System.’**

### **CHIP welcomes research on ‘The role of the solicitor in the children’s hearings system’**

In 2015, through CHIP, the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) commissioned the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) to carry out a research study looking at the role of solicitors in the children’s hearings system on behalf of the CHIP. The fieldwork took place between July and December 2015, and was designed to address the following:

- Defining the ethos of the children’s hearings system and applying this to solicitors
- The role and impact of solicitors in the modernised children’s hearings system
- How to achieve a fair and consistent approach to monitoring compliance
- How best to get feedback from professional and non-professional stakeholders
- Training of solicitors on children’s hearings.

The study included nationwide surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews conducted variously with solicitors, social workers, reporters, young people and panel members.

CHIP partners welcome this balanced and helpful insight into the contribution of legal representatives, particularly the perceptions of young people and system partners.

CHIP partners are committed to the essential and integral role of legal representatives in the hearings system, and note with satisfaction how solicitors can and do make hearings better for children and other partners.

We note that the fieldwork took place last year and we believe there has been considerable progress made in the time since the fieldwork:

- We have launched the CHIP ‘*Vision and Values for the Children’s Hearings System*’ which promotes a commitment to: understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities in the Hearing system; respect for the roles and responsibilities of others; a commitment to the principle of paramount concern of ‘best interests’ of the child/young person in all elements of our contributions, actions and decision making.
- We have developed a programme of work on ‘Better Hearings’ to consider and implement improvements that can be made to the operation of hearings.
- We have published a resource for children and young people about ‘*Helping me make choices about how best to take part in my children’s hearing*’ which sets out what they can expect from the Children’s Hearing process and the roles of those involved.

The recommendations offer a clear signal that more can, and should, be done in this area. As with other research, evaluation and feedback considered by CHIP, we will seek to apply and disseminate the learning for the benefit of partners and the children and families we serve. We have developed a workplan to implement the recommendations and this can be viewed here.

The CHIP is firmly of the view that solicitors make an essential contribution to ensuring a rights-proofed, high quality children's hearings process. As leaders in the system, we want to ensure that we can build on the work already being developed the recommendations are implemented for the benefit of all of those involved in the system and to improve the outcomes of some of Scotland's most vulnerable and at risk children and young people.